Reasonable Expectation of Adult Behavior

Most job ads and job descriptions do not include personal competencies or behavior statements. Clearly organizations must be careful to avoid asking for inappropriate information and infringing on personal rights.

Managers DO, however, have the right to require reasonable behaviors of employees that ensure work-conducive, safe, comfortable and harassment-free work environments for both employees and managers.

Does this happen already or happen naturally? Often not. Managers and employees have been describing situations at work for years... and often labeling them as difficult and even intolerable. These situations have included, but have certainly not been limited to, employees with:

- a basic dislike of each other,

- an inability to work together,

- penchants for ignoring all staff or specific staff members,

- rude behavior,

- excessive assertiveness and aggressiveness against other employees,

- gossiping and spreading rumors (truthful and untruthful),

- passive-aggressive behavior,

- sabotage of work product,

- overt hatred, and

- destructiveness.

These employee behaviors involve a variety of combinations but boil down to staff member against staff member and/or staff member against a specific manager. These situations have all levels of employees asking:

"How do I handle this specific situation?"

"What can I do legally?"

"How can I change behavior?"

Typical related concerns are:

➢ There is nothing about "getting along" in job descriptions.

➢ How do you include these situations in a staff member's job responsibilities or targets?

➢ How can I document this behavior?

➢ Where can I deal with these problems on employee evaluations?

Often (and this should be our goal) bad situations might be temporary and involve staff that would be considered successful in the completion of their job responsibilities.

The issues become:

• identifying problem behaviors not clearly addressed elsewhere such as in job descriptions

• establishing a norm for acceptable behavior (there is often a general one and then ones that might be specific to a department or physical environment,)

• a forum for documenting, evaluating and discussing the need for ...and,

• specific elements and times for change and/or improvement.

Listed below are issues that include patterns, gathered lists of common general problems and reoccurring bad behaviors and content for establishing basic standards or norms for behavior. These basic standards or norms are grouped under the heading "reasonable expectation of adult behavior."

There are several issues surrounding "reasonable expectation."

➢ Managers and employees have the right to expect employees to behave as adults.

➢ Managers and employees should work together to outline what adult behavior should be in work environments.

➢ Adult behavior expectations can and should be put in writing and addressed in employee evaluations even if only under existing broad categories such as "communication" or "works well with others."

➢ "Reasonable expectations" will vary from location to location and there may be a general document with sections specific to certain areas where the physical location or the work functions may dictate different needs.

➢ "Adult behavior" lists should be determined by first consulting with the employees themselves.

➢ Managers, given employee "adult behavior" input, determine what are "reasonable expectations," what constitutes a violation or unmet expectations and how to document and improve non-adult or unacceptable behaviors as well as a reportage/evaluation structure and process.

Some of the more common categories include:

- "common courtesies" such as acceptable greetings among employees, verbal rudeness, rudeness by omission and listening in one-on-one and group settings

- "environmental issues" such as temperature of work location, comfort and preference issues such as blinds open or closed and noise levels, shared work spaces, small work spaces, shared hardware and software

- "work relationships and values" such as respect the person, respect for work product, work ethic and disparate work values

- "how work or business gets done" such as valuing diverse work styles, understanding and misunderstanding different ways of communicating, work flow, energy and peak productivity patterns

- "emotional issues as they relate to work" such as handling criticism, personal issues affecting work productivity and how to deal with the result of personal problems interfering, dislike of fellow workers due to work-related issues, dislike of fellow works due to unexplained personal issues (employees who are negative reminders of non-work relationships and employees with habits including personal traits such as voice and laughter as well as habits such as smoking)

"Reasonable expectations" are by no means the answer to every personnel problem, but they do outline how people are to actually work in the same spaces.

All too often managers only spend their time outlining the work to be done, which is to do it, how it is to be done and how to measure what is done. While these things are obviously the primary job responsibilities of managers, it is critical that managers realize that their staff members spend more "waking" hours with each other than with their family members.

Examples:

Greetings/Common Courtesy

1. Please begin the workday by greeting employees and by responding to employees who greet you.

2. It would not be necessary or expedient to expect employees to continue to greet each other each time they meet during the day.

3. Employees should hold doors open or assist other employees as needed in similar situations.

4. Employees should use common courtesies such as "please" and "thank you."

5. Please follow the communication guidelines and include all recipients in necessary communiqués such as emails and memos.

6. Although workspaces are tight and we have many common work areas, please inform others when you need privacy and respect others privacy when working alone or working in groups.

7. Although the importance of and procedures that relate to confidentiality of patron and work information is essential and spelled out in the communication policy, it is critical that those same standards be applied to personal or tangentially related work information sharing as well.

8. Employees should observe those recommendations for communication that include:

- taking personal statements out of work-related (and other) critical or evaluative information
- using the standard communication forms for critiquing other workgroup or team products
- sharing all relevant and needed information based on the communication chart to avoid organizational secrets, non-or untimely disclosure of needed work-related information
- giving all necessary and appropriate credit where credit is due
- giving positive feedback as appropriate and needed and in a timely manner

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